

COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES TASMANIA

11 September 2026

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Government Administration B
Parliament House
Hobart TAS 7000

via email: policeinquiry@parliament.tas.gov.au

To the Committee Secretariat,

Re: Inquiry into Tasmania Police responses to allegations of officer misconduct

Community Legal Centres Tasmania (CLC Tas) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the *Inquiry into Tasmania Police responses to allegations of officer misconduct* ('the Inquiry').¹ Our submission addresses the first term of reference namely the adequacy of systems, processes and oversight arrangements for responding to allegations of serious misconduct within Tasmania Police. We strongly believe that an independent investigating mechanism must be established to ensure both confidentiality and an assurance that serious misconduct involving police officers is thoroughly investigated.

CLC Tas is the peak body representing the interests of nine community legal centres (CLCs) located throughout Tasmania. We are a member-based, independent, not-for-profit and incorporated organisation that advocates for law reform on a range of public interest matters aimed at improving access to justice, reducing discrimination and protecting and promoting human rights.

Background

Over a thirty year period, Paul Reynolds, a Senior Sergeant with Tasmania Police groomed and in some cases sexually abused young boys by "leveraging his status as a senior police officer."² In 2008, at a social gathering at the Tasmania Police Academy Bar, visiting interstate police officers overheard a conversation in which two senior members of Tasmania Police (both with the rank of Inspector) described Reynolds as "a paedophile" and gave examples "of concerning behaviour".³ One Inspector said that he had visited Paul Reynold's home and saw him with a 15-year-old boy between his legs, giving him a massage. Another Inspector

¹ CLC Tas would like to acknowledge those persons and organisations who gave freely of their time in assisting with our submission.

² Regina Weiss, *Weiss Independent Review into Paul Reynolds: Final Report* (Report, Tasmania Police, 28 June 2024) 3.

³ Commission of Inquiry Report, 'Chapter 16, Volume 7 – Criminal justice response' at para. 3.2.6. As found at <https://www.commissionofinquiry.tas.gov.au/report/listing/volume-7/chapter-16> (accessed 9 September 2026). Also see Regina Weiss, *Weiss Independent Review into Paul Reynolds: Final Report* (Report, Tasmania Police, 28 June 2024).

reportedly said that his wife had been approached by people in the community concerned about Reynolds' behaviour around young boys. The visiting police officers formally reported the allegation to the then Internal Investigations Unit within Tasmania Police which investigated the complaint by seeking written clarification from the Inspectors present. The Inspectors denied ever saying that Reynolds was a paedophile and insisted that there had been a misrepresentation of their conversation. An Assistant Commissioner who was also present during the 'paedophile' conversation was "made aware" of the responses provided by the two Inspectors and in his written response echoed the response that there was no mention of paedophilia and the complaint should not be pursued. The Internal Investigations Unit subsequently recommended that with "no other evidence" available "the weight of evidence suggests [the interstate police officer] was either mistaken or misinterpreted the comments".⁴

More than a decade passed before another complaint was made by a Tasmania police officer who alleged that "the Senior Sergeant [Paul Reynolds] is procuring young persons for sexual purposes or grooming young persons, that he is sending photographs of his genitalia to children with the inference that he would be receiving child exploitation material in return from them".⁵ Within days, interviews were conducted with the teenage boys identified in the complaint and thereafter a search warrant was executed on Reynold's house where items were seized including his mobile phone, laptop and other electronic devices. The following day Reynolds died by suicide with the investigation into sexual misconduct being closed without being finalised.

Making a complaint against Tasmania Police

Pursuant to section 44 of the *Police Service Act 2003* (Tas) a complaint about a police officer can be made by anyone:

44. Making complaints

- (1) Any person may make a complaint about –
 - (a) the conduct, on or off duty, of a police officer; or*
 - (b) the conduct, on or off duty, of a person who was a police officer at the time the conduct occurred.**
- (2) A complaint –
 - (a) must be made in writing or in a manner approved by the Commissioner; and*
 - (b) must be made within 6 months after the conduct became known to the complainant; and*
 - (c) must contain details of the conduct; and*
 - (d) does not need to identify the complainant.**
- (3) The Commissioner –
 - (a) may accept a complaint that is not made as specified in subsection (2)(a) if satisfied that special circumstances exist; and*
 - (b) if accepting the complaint, is to record the complaint in writing.**
- (4) The Commissioner may accept a complaint that is made outside the period referred to in subsection (2)(b) if satisfied that there are special circumstances.*

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Complaints are able to be made online or at the local police station.⁶ After receiving the complaint, a determination is made by the Professional Standards Command as to whether to investigate the complaint.⁷ Upon completion of an investigation, if satisfied that the code of conduct has been breached, a range of sanctions can be imposed including a reprimand, a fine, a reassignment of duties and a recommendation that the police officers' employment be terminated.⁸

When complaints are received, they are assessed internally by the Professional Standards Command and categorised as set out in the following Table.

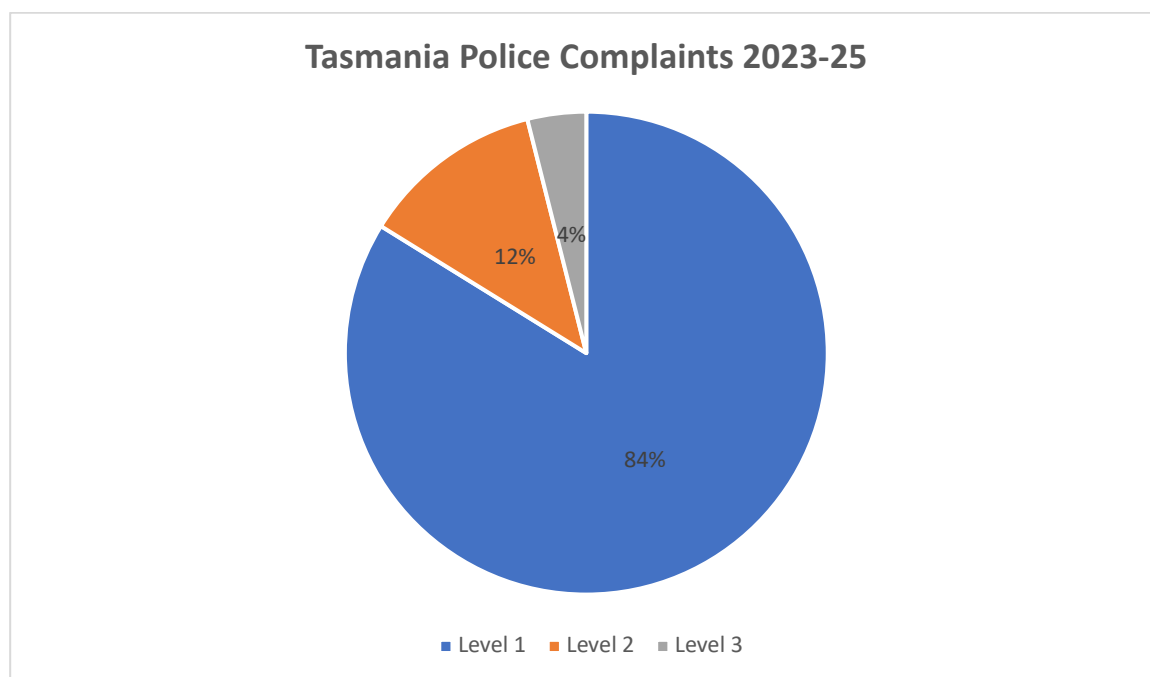
Complaint categories

Level 1	These matters are dealt with by supervisors, and are assessed as lower-level matters that do not have the potential to amount to a breach of the Code of Conduct, such as complaints relating to the length or outcome of an inquiry.
Level 2	These matters are more serious and are dealt with as a potential breach of the Code of Conduct. These are generally referred to districts for investigation / resolution.
Level 3	These are serious matters and are dealt with as a potential breach of the Code of Conduct or criminal behaviour. If proven, they may warrant termination of appointment and/or serious offence or crime. These matters are generally retained by Professional Standards for investigation

Source: Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management (Tas), *Tasmania Police Professional Standards Complaints and Outcomes Summary Statement 2025*

Complaints against Tasmania Police

Over the last three years, Tasmania Police has received 865 internal and external complaints with the overwhelming majority (4 out of 5) assessed as "lower level [Level 1] matters":



⁶ Tasmania Police, *Compliments and Complaints* (Web Page) <https://www.police.tas.gov.au/contact-us/compliments-and-complaints/>

⁷ Section 46(1) of the *Police Service Act 2003* (Tas).

⁸ Section 43(3) of the *Police Service Act 2003* (Tas).

Nevertheless, in 2025, a number of police officers were charged with serious criminal offences including charges of assault, family violence, strangulation and possessing child exploitation material. In many cases, the police officer resigned without a determination notice having been made.⁹ Police officers were also investigated for failing to “act with care and diligence in the course of his or her duties” and using “excessive force”.¹⁰

Complaints of police misconduct are initially investigated by Tasmania Police Professional Standards Command, meaning police officers are responsible for investigating other police officers. We are concerned that this may lead to perceptions of bias and conflicts of interest and strongly believe that an independent body should be established to investigate complaints made against Tasmania Police. This was also noted in the *Independent Review into Paul Reynolds*, with the reviewer noting:¹¹

The reluctance to report was exacerbated by the inability for victims, their families, bystanders and even police officers to report Reynolds’ conduct to a body independent of Tasmania Police. Participants were overwhelmingly supportive of an independent reporting and investigation mechanism which sits outside Tasmania Police for reports of grooming and sexual abuse conduct suspected of Tasmania Police officers and staff.

Calls for an independent body to investigate complaints against police has also been recommended by the Police Accountability Project (PAP), a specialist public interest legal practice based in Victoria that helps victims of police misconduct and systemic abuse seek justice and reform. Recently, the PAP has called for a Police Ombudsman in Victoria¹² on the grounds that a “investigating body must be not only institutionally independent of police but also practically, culturally and politically independent”.¹³

Finally, the United Nations Human Rights Committee has also observed that Australian police must be independently investigated where allegations of human rights abuses are made. In *Horvath*, a 2014 case involving the abuse of a Victorian woman by police, the United Nations stated:¹⁴

In the present case, the disciplinary claims before the Police Department were dismissed for lack of evidence. In this respect, the Committee notes the author’s allegations, uncontested by the State party, that neither author nor the other civilian witnesses were called to give evidence; that the author was refused access to the file; that there was no public hearing; and that once the civil proceeding finding was made, there was no

⁹ Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management (Tas), *Tasmania Police Professional Standards Complaints and Outcomes Summary Statement 2025*, 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 7-9.

¹¹ Regina Weiss, *Weiss Independent Review into Paul Reynolds: Final Report* (Report, Tasmania Police, 28 June 2024) 1, 36.

¹² Nadia Morales and Narita Waight, *Victoria Needs a Police Ombudsman* (Joint Letter to Premier Daniel Andrews, 7 October 2022) Police Accountability Project <https://policeaccountability.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/221007-Joint-letter-Police-Ombudsman-media.pdf>

¹³ Police Accountability Project, *Independent Investigation of Complaints against the Police: Policy Briefing Paper* (Policy Briefing Paper, 2017) https://www.policeaccountability.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Policy-Briefing-Paper-2017_online.pdf

¹⁴ Human Rights Committee, *Horvath v Australia*, Communication No 1885/2009, UN Doc CCPR/C/110/D/1885/2009 (27 March 2014), [8.4].

opportunity to reopen or recommence disciplinary proceedings. In view of these shortcomings and given the nature of the deciding body, the Committee considers that the State party failed to show that the proceedings met the requirements of an effective remedy under article 2, paragraph 3 of the ICCPR.

Human right standards noted in the above decision and endorsed by the PAP would result in the following five benchmarks being met:¹⁵

1. ***Independent of the police*** – Must be not only institutionally independent of police but also practically, culturally and politically independent.
2. ***Capable of conducting an adequate investigation*** – Must be capable of ascertaining whether the actions of police breach legal or disciplinary standards and whether police practices are in compliance with human rights.
3. ***Prompt*** – Police suspects and witnesses must be separated and interviewed immediately for both criminal and administrative purposes.
4. ***Open to public scrutiny*** – Data on complaints against police, as well as disciplinary action, civil litigation and prosecutions against police should be regularly and publicly reported.
5. ***Victim-centred and enables the victim to fully participate in the investigation*** – Complainants need to be protected from victimisation after making a complaint and should be entitled to full and frank reasons for the decision on their complaint and to be provided with the capacity to seek review of that decision.

The failure to incorporate a human-rights focused response to police misconduct led to a number of significant deficiencies in the 2008 Reynolds complaint including:

- *No independent investigation.* Instead, Tasmania Police were responsible for investigating a complaint made against a police officer; and
- *Failure to conduct in-person interviews.* Instead, written responses were requested, providing senior police officers with an opportunity to be “made aware” of responses/versions of events; and
- *Lack of thorough investigation.* Instead, written responses from two Inspectors were provided to an Assistant Commissioner before he too was allowed to provide a written response; and
- *Failure to appropriately investigate* with no interview being sought of 15-year-old boy who was seen between Reynold’s legs or of the wife of the police officer who had been approached by people in the community concerned about Reynolds’ behaviour around young boys.

Independent investigating mechanism will lead to increased complaints

As well as the failure of Tasmania Police to appropriately investigate the 2008 Reynolds complaint, we also believe that the lack of an independent investigating body means that there is a reluctance from both members of the public and police officers to make complaints.

¹⁵ Police Accountability Project, *Independent Investigation of Complaints against the Police: Policy Briefing Paper* (Policy Briefing Paper, 2017) https://www.policeaccountability.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Policy-Briefing-Paper-2017_online.pdf

For example, a community member who witnessed Reynolds engaging in questionable conduct with a teenage boy observed:¹⁶

If I could have reported his behaviour safely and confidentially to someone outside of police, I would have. But he was a senior police officer and I couldn't take the risk of him finding out in this small community so I didn't.

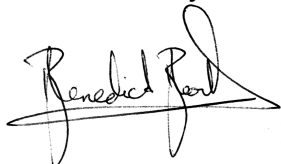
Similarly, a serving police officer who provided evidence to the *Independent Review into Paul Reynolds* stated:¹⁷

If there was some way to [make complaints] anonymously, and with assurances that people you work with wouldn't find out, police would report on each other more. I still think there is some ways to go to break the culture of not wanting to rat on each other. What we need is an independent system that actually works.

In summary, the above observations clearly highlight that members of the public and police officers would feel more comfortable reporting to an independent body. However, an independent mechanism in and of itself will not be sufficient if it does not also meet the human rights standards set out in *Horvath* including prompt and thorough investigations that are victim-centred and open to public scrutiny.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Benedict Bartl', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Benedict Bartl
Policy Officer
Community Legal Centres Tasmania

¹⁶ Regina Weiss, *Weiss Independent Review into Paul Reynolds: Final Report* (Report, Tasmania Police, 28 June 2024) 1, 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 36.